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One *Volk*, One Church? A Critique of the "Folk Church" Ideology in Finland

Titus Hjelm

Is the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) a state church or not?[1] The answer depends on whom you ask. Looking at international surveys and comparisons, the answer is a clear "yes." On Chaves and Cann's six-point scale, Finland scored the highest of all 18 countries compared in terms of the state privileging one or more denominations.[2] Christensen's analysis of historical and current debates on the issue of Finnish church and state relations—in many ways a precursor to my own aims here—says clearly, "The Church exists within a special relationship with the state, and maintains many of the same designations it held when its ties to the state were more official."[3] Robbers lists Finland among the countries with "a State Church or predominant religion."[4] Finally, Fox's global comparison of religion and state relations files Finland under countries with "active state

[1] Both the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finland have constitutional and legislative privileges that set them apart from other religious communities. This article focuses only on the former, as its size and social impact make it the paradigmatic case for debates on church and state in Finland.

[2] Mark Chaves and David E. Cann, "Regulation, Pluralism, and Religious Market Structure: Explaining Religion's Vitality," *Rationality and Society* 4, no. 3 (1992): 280, 284.

[3] Elizabeth Christensen, "Is the Lutheran Church Still the State Church? An Analysis of Church-State Relations in Finland," *Brigham Young University Law Review* 2 (1995): 601.

[4] Gerhard Robbers, "State and Church in the European Union," in *State and Church in the European Union*, 2nd edition, ed. Gerhard Robbers (BadenBaden: Nomos 2005), 578; see Michael Minkenberg, "The Policy Impact of Church-State Relations: Family Policy and Abortion in Britain, France, and Germany," *West European Politics* 26, no.1 (2003): 195–217.

religions," i.e. countries where "the state has one or more official religions *and* the state actively promotes the state religion [through various measures]."[5]

Against this background, the picture emerging from Finnish scholarship—especially theological analysis—is strikingly different: according to these views, the ELCF is *not* a state church. It is instead called a national, or a "folk" church (*kansankirkko*). Here the ELCF supposedly joins the other Nordic "folk" churches.

This article is a critical historicization of the concept of "folk church" in Finland. It historicizes in the sense that it treats the concept not only as an accurate or inaccurate description of church-state relations in Finland, but also as an active architect of those relations. It is critical in the sense that it examines how the use of "folk church" contributes to particular ways of understanding the relationship between religious communities and the state, at the same time suppressing alternative understandings. In other words, the article asks *what is being done* when the ELCF is called a "folk church," and what potential consequences does this have for the organization of church-state relations and religious equality in Finland?

The construction of the "folk church" is examined through the analytical lens of what I call contemporary ideology critique. Ideology critique scrutinizes how discourse suppresses alternative understandings of social issues. The analysis has three sources: (1) Finnish and international scholarship, (2) the ELCF's official representations of the relationship between church and state, and (3) a debate in the Finnish parliament concerning changes to the constitution and laws setting the ELCF apart from other religious communities. After introducing contemporary ideology critique and a brief historical contextualization of the issue, I will analyse each of these sources in turn. My aim is to show that seemingly innocent

[5] Jonathan Fox, *A World Survey of Religion and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 111. Emphasis in the original.

definition-work by academics and the ELCF reflects on legislation processes such as the one analysed here. In conclusion, I argue that the concept of "folk church" functions ideologically by reproducing religious inequality in Finland.

Contemporary Ideology Critique and the Discursive Construction of Church and State

The relationship between church and state is historically constructed in tradition and legislation. In democratic regimes, this construction is accomplished through discourse, that is, the ways in which we talk about the relationship. However, scholarship on the discursive study of religion often omits the fact that discourse is rarely a matter of gentle evolution.[6] Instead, church and state relations in democracies are outcomes of discursive struggles and negotiations over the "correct" way of organizing the relationship. Hence, the process cannot be separated from questions of power.[7]

Which brings us to ideology. This is a notoriously slippery concept—one mapping of scholarship concludes that "ideology" is used in 27 different ways—and the fact that the term is also regularly employed in everyday discourse complicates things further.[8] For the purposes of this paper, however, it is sufficient to divide the different uses into two main

[6] Kocku von Stuckrad, "Reflections on the Limits of Reflection: An Invitation to the Discursive Study of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22, no. 2/3 (2010): 156–169.

[7] Titus Hjelm, "Religion, Discourse and Power: A Contribution towards a Critical Sociology of Religion," *Critical Sociology* 40/6 (2014), 855–872.

[8] Malcolm Hamilton, "The Elements of the Concept of Ideology," *Political Studies* 35 (1987): 18–38.

strands and to develop the analytical strategy from there. Following Thompson, I will discuss the neutral and critical conceptions of ideology.[9]

The neutral conception of ideology is familiar from the everyday uses of the term, where it is used to denote a "worldview." All kinds of isms are frequently called ideologies. Political parties represent some of these ideologies, such as socialism and nationalism. Some, like feminism and environmentalism, for example, are labels for broader social movements and attitudes. The root of the neutral conception is in the ways in which classical social and political theory used "ideology." Thompson calls this the "grand narrative of cultural transformation" in thinkers like Marx and Weber, who discussed ideologies (in the plural) as secular alternatives to religion, which "serve to mobilize political action without reference to other-worldly values or beings."[10] To put it differently, ideology in the neutral sense is a *noun* that describes the content of a worldview.

Now, the critical conception looks at ideology quite differently. The critical tradition harks back to Marx and Engels—their *German Ideology* (1845), especially—although both also used ideology in the neutral sense. In this critical sense, ideology is intimately connected with power: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force."[11] Famously, Marx saw religion—or Christianity more accurately—as an ideological tool for the ruling classes. Its opium-like qualities dulled the pain of everyday drudgery among the working classes and took attention away from improving their own conditions in this life by

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[9] John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

[10] Thompson, *Ideology*, 77.

[11] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology (1845)*, accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01b.htm.

postulating salvation in the afterlife.[12] Marx's treatment of religion as opium is an example of what is often referred to as ideology critique. Ideology in this sense, then, is an *adjective* or an *adverb* that denotes a process where a particular idea works ideologically by suppressing alternative ideas.

What I call contemporary ideology critique takes the cue from Marx and Engels, but instead of vague "ideas," it focuses on the manifest use of language, that is, discourse. Thompson defines ideology as "meaning in the service of power."[13] Norman Fairclough speaks of ideologies as "constructions of reality (the physical world, social relations, social identities), which are built into various dimensions of the forms/meanings of discursive practices, and which contribute to the production, reproduction or transformation of relations of domination."[14] As said above, church and state relations are discursive constructions, but *how* we talk about these relations influences which discourse becomes dominant, which in turn has consequences for legislation and policy. Ideology critique analyses and "unmasks" ideological functions of church-state discourses.

The critical discursive study of religion (CDSR), of which this article is an example, employs the concept of ideology in its critical sense.[15] It seeks to analyse "the naturalization of inequality and the neutralization of dissent" in the form and meaning of discourse.[16] CDSR

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[12] Andrew M. McKinnon, "Opium as Dialectics of Religion: Metaphor, Expression and Protest," in *Marx, Critical Theory, and Religion*, ed. Warren S. Goldstein (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006), 11–29.

[13] Thompson, *Ideology*, 7.

[14] Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), 87.

1. [15] Titus Hjelm, "Theory and Method in Critical Discursive Study of Religion: An Outline," in *Making Religion: Theory and Practice in the Discursive Study of Religion*, eds. Kocku von Stuckrad and Frans Wijsen (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 15–34.

[16] John E. Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 6.

does not stop at the description of *what is said*, but treats discourse as social action and examines *what is being done* when something is said. In the empirical analysis of discursive forms, I have applied elements from the template used by critical discourse analysts Norman Fairclough and John Richardson.[17] These elements examine aspects of texts such as word choice, agency attribution, and textual presupposition. On a broader level of analysis, the focus is on the narrative and rhetorical aspects of discourse. Rather than indulging in an extended exposition of the apparatus at this point, I will discuss relevant methodological aspects as they arise in the analysis.[18] Suffice it to say that the analytical focus of this article is on broader meaning rather than linguistic detail.

Contemporary critique of ideology is always contextual. It is not mainly interested in the properties of "text" as such. Indeed, it is equally interested in what is *not* said as it is with what is said. What are the alternative discourses that are being suppressed when a discourse works ideologically? Whose voice can we hear and who is silenced? Refraining from saying something can be as ideological as saying it. Especially pertinent for the theme of this article is the construction of "common sense." Common sense *naturalizes* our conceptions of the world and is therefore, according to Fairclough, "substantially, though not entirely, *ideological.*"[19] Knowing what passes for common sense and why requires, however, an understanding of the context of discourse, which a strictly textual focus cannot provide.

Milestones in Finnish Church-State Relations

[17] Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers*, 46–74; Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 231–238.

[18] See Hjelm, "Religion, Discourse, and Power," 860–865.

[19] Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 84. Emphasis in the original.

A full discussion of the history of the state church and its discursive uses is beyond the scope of this article. However, a brief outline of some key dates variously offered as the dates for the separation of church and state helps to contextualize the analysis below.

In a strict sense, the history of the ELCF begins in 1809 when Sweden ceded its eastern province of Finland to Russia. Before that date, Finnish religious life was uniformly dominated by the Swedish Lutheran church under the leadership of the monarch since Gustav Vasa's top-down reformation in 1527. Under the Orthodox Russian Empire, Finland retained its Lutheran faith, and the ELCF became the state church of the autonomous Grand Duchy.

The current ELCF webpage offers 1870 as the definitive date for the separation of state and church.[20] The text offers no explanation why this year is significant, but the date is a reference to the Church Act of 1869 (which came into force the following year). This Act created the institution of the church synod and was a significant step in the growth of the autonomy of the ELCF from the church's point of view. Because the Church Act covered only members of the ELCF and not all Finnish citizens (as previously), it tacitly admitted that Finns could be members of another Christian church. However, as church historian Juha Seppo puts it: "Everyone was still required to belong to some religious community. Thus the act did not acknowledge a complete freedom of conscience and religion, nor was it familiar with the idea of a confessionally neutral state."[21]

Significantly, Finnish history writing, when it comes to the role of the ELCF, seems to assume that an increase in the freedom of religion equals a proportional decrease in the

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[20] "State Church and Folk Church," Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, accessed April 18, 2019, https://evl.fi/tietoa-kirkosta/kirkko-ja-yhteiskunta/valtionkirkko-ja-kansankirkko.

[21] Juha Seppo, "The Freedom of Religion and Conscience in Finland," *Journal of Church and State* 40, no. 4 (1998): 847–872, 852; Kimmo Kääriäinen, Kati Niemelä, and Kimmo Ketola, *Religion in Finland: Decline, Change and Transformation in Finnish Religiosity* (Tampere: Kirkon tutkimuskeskus, 2005), 55–6.

proximity of church and state. The first Constitution of independent Finland (1919) did, in principle, guarantee freedom of religion for the individual, and the Freedom of Religion Act of 1922 (in effect from 1923 onwards) further confirmed this. However, the ELCF retained its privileged position in the 1919 Constitution. Although practice of religion was free, a separate mention of one religious community in a country's Constitution set it apart.

> Section 83 [Church Code for Evangelical Lutheran Church]
>
> (1) Provisions on the organisation and administration of the Evangelical Lutheran church shall be prescribed in the Church Code.
>
> (2) Other existing religious communities shall be governed by the provisions enacted or to be enacted on these communities.
>
> (3) New religious communities may be established in the manner prescribed by Act of Parliament.[22]

The Constitution of 1999 retained this special mention, even if the wording changed:

> Section 76 - The Church Act
>
> Provisions on the organisation and administration of the Evangelic Lutheran Church are laid down in the Church Act.
>
> The legislative procedure for enactment of the Church Act and the right to submit legislative proposals relating to the Church Act are governed by the specific provisions in that Code.[23]

As the analysis below shows, the Constitution and various legislation on religion gives rise to varying interpretations. Constitutional and legislative "facts" are not—at least in the Finnish context—in themselves arbiters of terminology. What would pass for "state

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[22] This is an unofficial translation from the International Constitutional Law Project, accessed April 18, 2019, http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/fi01000_.html. It should be noted that the 1919 Constitution, unlike the 1999 one, also mentions the "Greek Orthodox Church" in Section 90 (Other Appointments): "(1) Special provisions shall govern appointment procedures to public offices in institutions of higher education, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Greek Orthodox Church as well as to public offices in the Bank of Finland."

[23] *The Constitution of Finland (11 June 1999),* Finland Ministry of Justice, accessed April 18, 2019, http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/1999/en19990731.pdf. This is an unofficial translation.

church" in some other contexts is a contested notion in Finland. The concept of "folk church" is a key alternative, the uses of which I examine in the following sections.

"Folk Church" in Finnish Scholarly Discourse

A detailed conceptual history of the term "folk church" in Finland is yet to be written, so I will only touch upon the broad contours of its use in contemporary Finnish and international scholarship. In this analysis, I have identified three main academic discourses: ELCF as folk church instead of state church, ELCF as an ambiguous folk church, and ELCF as state church.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the discourse on the ELCF as a folk church can be traced back to one source, namely church historian and Archbishop Mikko Juva's book *Valtiokirkosta kansankirkoksi* (*From State Church to Folk Church*).[24] Not only did the title canonize the term "folk church," but it also naturalized the idea that the church moved from one status to another.[25] In the book, Juva analysed late nineteenth-century debates regarding the status of the ELCF. Interestingly, although it is clear from the analysis that many contemporaries recognized that the debates challenged the prevailing state-church relations, there is hardly any mention of "folk church" in them. Juva seems to assume that the ELCF is in any case a folk church, which he describes as a "status that it has had for centuries."[26] What he is (implicitly) suggesting is that the change from state church to folk

[24] Mikko Juva, *Valtiokirkosta kansankirkoksi* (Helsinki: Suomen kirkkohistoriallinen seura, 1960). All translations from the Finnish by the author.

[25] The German term *Volkskirche* can be traced to the writings of Friedrich Schleiermacher and appears in Finnish sources from the late 19th century, but for contemporary uses, Juva can be argued to be the main source. See Martin Hein, Wilhelm Hüffmeier, and Reiner Preul, "People's Church (Volkskirche)," in *Religion Past and Present*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz, Don S. Browning, Bernd Janowski, and Eberhard Jüngel, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1877-5888_rpp_COM_025376.

[26] Juva, *Valtiokirkosta kansankirkoksi*, 105.

church is a change of emphasis, rather than a completely novel way of conceptualizing the status of the ELCF.

Naturalization is, according to Fairclough, the process in which "ideological representations . . . come to be seen as non-ideological 'common sense.'"[27] There could hardly be a better term for the impact that Juva's work has had. This has been especially profound in the socialization of new generations of theologians who have imbibed the terminology of the book, which has been part of course reading lists since its publication. As said above, it not only introduced the term "folk church," but made it a premise of Finnish church history that there has been a movement in state-church relations from one status to another.

This is most obvious in research that never explicates or justifies the use of "folk church." For example, Ryman et al.'s book *Nordic Folk Churches: A Contemporary Church History* takes the term for granted, both generally and in the Finnish case. The introduction discusses the many entanglements of state and church from 1000 to 1940, but never talks about state churches. However, once we get to post-1940 Finland, the ELCF is introduced as a "folk church," the only explicit criterion being that it is a "nationally significant church."[28] A major history of the central synod of the ELCF between 1974 and 2011 puts "folk church" in the title, but does not explicate its use, although state-church relations get their own

[27] Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Longman, 1995), 28; Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Power* (London: Longman, 1989).

[28] Björn Ryman, "Nordic Churches from 1000 to 1940," in *Nordic Folk Churches: A Contemporary Church History* by Björn Ryman, Aila Lauha, Gunnar Heiene and Peter Lodberg (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1–17; Aila Lauha, "Finnish Christianity since 1940," in *Nordic Folk Churches: A Contemporary Church History* by Björn Ryman, Aila Lauha, Gunnar Heiene and Peter Lodberg (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 27–40.

chapter.[29] Similarly, "folk church" is repeated uncritically in research reports produced by the church, even when—or perhaps especially when—they are about the question of state-church relations itself.[30] In these examples, the term has become fully naturalized.

If the above examples simply take "folk church" as a common-sense term, another type of study argues that there has been a change from state church to folk church. The historical process is explicated, then, but—following Juva's example—becomes itself naturalized. Importantly for the socialization of future theologians, the latest introductory textbook for Finnish church history follows Juva faithfully but presents the change from state to folk church as an outcome of human actions rather than an unquestioned (and unquestionable) fact.[31]

Providing some historical background becomes important especially in English-language publications (by Finns and others alike), because when writing for an international audience, authors cannot assume the same contextual knowledge that makes "folk church" a meaningful term for Finns.[32] In other words, the basis for calling the ELCF a folk church would have to be articulated, at least in principle, more explicitly.[33] Interestingly, in these cases, the state church status seems to haunt the narrative in the background, although, ultimately, "folk church" or "national church" is the correct denominator for these authors.

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[29] Jaakko Olavi Antila, *Kansankirkko ristipaineessa: Suomen luterilainen kirkolliskokous, 1974–2011* (Helsinki: Suomalaisten kirjallisuuden seura, 2014).

[30] Leena Sorsa, *Kirkkona valtiossa: Katsaus Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon valtiosuhteen edellytyksiin ja uudistuspaineisiin*. Kirkon tutkimuskeskuksen verkkojulkaisuja 41 (Tampere: Kirkon tutkimuskeskus, 2015).

[31] Simo Heininen, Markku Heikkilä, *Suomen kirkkohistoria* (Helsinki: Edita, 1996), 207, 227–228.

[32] Except in the other Nordic countries, where "folk church" is a common denominator.

[33] Although Ryman et al.'s book, which is discussed above, defies this argument.

In a translated and updated edition of a German original, *Finland: Its Church and Its People*, Geert Sentzke articulates the change by saying that "the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is no longer a State Church in the strict sense of the word, but rather a national church linked with the State."[34] Nils G. Holm dates the separation of church and state to the passing of the Freedom of Religion Act of 1922/3, which led to the creation of what he also calls the two "national churches" (the ELCF and the Orthodox church).[35] Again, vestiges of the state church status remain, although of the Nordic churches, "the national churches in Finland have the most liberated position in relation to the state."[36] Sihvo, writing in the same journal issue as Holm, also acknowledges that "the ties between church and state are many and strong" in Finland. Yet, Sihvo repeats Juva's title almost verbatim when he says that "the state church is changing into a folk church."[37] All get support from Juha Seppo, who does not mention "folk church," but argues forcefully that in Finland church and state are separate.[38] The most recent (2017) survey of religion in the Nordic countries takes an

[34] Geert Sentzke, *Finland: Its Church and Its People* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society, 1963). The original is *Die Kirche Finnlands* (1935).

[35] Sakaranaho also speaks of a "national church," but she does not discuss church-state relations as such. Incidentally, her book chapter is titled "One Religion, One Nation?" This is not a case of copying, because the titles speak of different things. First, the issue at stake in the current analysis is the status of the ELCF in particular, not Christianity in general. Second, translation is complex, but I think "folk"—indeed, in the German sense of *volk*—captures the primordial nature of the arguments regarding the role of the ELCF in Finnish culture better than "nation," which is a more formal-sounding, institutionalized entity. Tuula Sakaranaho, "One Religion, One Nation? State, Church and Freedom of Religion in Finland," in *Religious Experience: North and South*, ed. René Gothóni (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 89–123.

[36] Nils G. Holm, "Religion in Finland and the Scandinavian Model," *Social Compass* 38, no. 1 (1991): 9–15; This position could be challenged after the year 2000, when Sweden officially separated church and state. Göran Gustafsson, "Church–State Separation Swedish-Style," *West European Politics* 26, no. 1 (2003): 51–72.

[37] Jouko Sihvo, "The Evangelical-Lutheran Church and State in Finland," *Social Compass* 38, no. 1 (1991): 17–24.

[38] Seppo, "The Freedom of Religion and Conscience in Finland," 853–4.

ambiguous line as well: Overall, the book's introduction distances itself from the concept of "folk church," yet in the case of Finland, a later chapter states that the ELCF and the Orthodox Church in Finland are "official folk churches."[39]

Matti Kotiranta's 2010 overview of Finnish church-state relations is probably the most conceptually conscious effort at discussing the status of the ELCF. It is worth quoting at length here:

> In social debate the concept of a state church has often been given a negative ideological shade of meaning. It has been suggested that the majority church, because it is a state church and enjoys certain privileges, is a threat to genuine freedom of religion and the status of religious minorities. An alternative expression to state church that is often mentioned, and a softer one with regard to the social position of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, is *folk church*. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has emphasized for decades that it is first and foremost a folk church.[40]

For Kotiranta, speaking about the ELCF as a state church is *ideological*, which for him equals negative. Folk church, Kotiranta argues, is an alternative term that not only the church espouses, but as he later himself says, is accurate because the ELCF is a "folk church which serves the whole people." Indeed, speaking of a state church is matter of law, while "folk church" is used to denote the sociological significance of the ELCF. Discursively speaking, what is interesting in the above quote is the simultaneous obfuscation of agency and how the author distances himself from what it said (modality): things have been given a meaning, have been suggested, and are mentioned by others, but we never learn who those

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[39] Inger Furseth, "Introduction," in *Religious Complexity in the Public Sphere: Comparing Nordic Countries,* ed. Inger Furseth (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1–29; Lene Kühle, Ulla Schmidt, Ulla, Brian Arly, and Per Petterson, "Religion and State: Complexity in Change," in *Religious Complexity in the Public Sphere: Comparing Nordic Countries, ed.* Inger Furseth (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 81–135.

[40] Matti Kotiranta, "Religion and the Secular State in Finland," in *Religion and the Secular State: Interim National Reports*, ed. Javier Martínez-Torrón and W. Cole Durham, Jr. (Provo, UT: The International Center for Law and Religion Studies, Brigham Young University, 2010), 277. Emphasis in the original.

people or institutions are. In contrast to this, Kotiranta's italicized take-home point is unequivocal: "*with the shift to folk church the traditional state church has been assigned to history*."[41]

I would argue that the above cases are not examples of conceptual ambiguity—my second type of discourse discussed below—but rather of contradiction. The close relation of the ELCF with the state is acknowledged, yet all reproduce Juva's original idea that the ELCF has changed from state church to "folk" or "national" church.[42] It seems that these researchers—many of them theologians—want to have their cake and eat it too.

The second type of discourse arising from the research literature is much more hesitant to use the term "folk church," even if what they describe ultimately ends up looking a lot like what Juva's followers espouse. In terms of authors distancing themselves from the question of the appropriate title for the ELCF, Kääriäinen's brief note that "some speak of it as a state church, while others call it a state church," acknowledges the use of both but refrains from taking a stand on terminology as such.[43]

A slightly different case is that of "civil religion" and its derivatives. Originally coined by Rousseau, civil religion became one of the most debated terms especially in American scholarship after Robert Bellah's much-cited essay "Civil Religion in America."[44] However, where Bellah situates civil religion in practices outside institutional religion, such as the singing of national anthems and presidential speeches, Finnish treatments equate civil religion with the ELCF. Finnish national identity, according to this discourse, is so intimately

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[41] Kotiranta, "Religion and the Secular State in Finland," 277.

[42] Except in the cases mentioned above, where "folk church" is completely naturalized.

[43] Kimmo Kääriäinen, "Religion and State in Finland," *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 24, no. 2 (2011): 159.

[44] Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (1967): 1–21.

tied up with the institution of the ELCF that the church simply becomes an institutional manifestation of civil religion.[45] It is hence a "national church" in the sense of the first type of discourse, but "civil religion" is used instead of explicit reference to "national" or "folk" church. The more important difference here is that "civil religion" is not used to replace a "state church," that is, the church *could* be considered a state church as well, but civil religion is agnostic about that.

A relatively recent key work on religion in contemporary Finnish society (published both in Finnish and English) argues in a similar vein using the term "popular religion": "Institutional religion has ceded ground while popular religion emanating from people's own needs and life situations has persisted and has partly found a channel for its expression also within the sphere of institutional religion."[46] In this discourse, the Durkheimian national rituals of civil religion are replaced by individualistic popular religion. While the ELCF's impact on society has decreased, it remains a significant context for expressing individual belief—even when that belief is mixed with other non-orthodox beliefs and practices. Again, the church might or might not be a state church, but it certainly looks like a "folk church,"

[45] Tapio Lampinen, "Kansalaisuskonto vain yhteiskuntauskonto?" in *Rajojen Ylityksiä: uskonto, kirkko, sosiologia*, ed. Anne Birgitta Yeung, Heikki Pesonen, and Susan Sundback (Helsinki: Suomalainen teologinen kirjallisuusseura, 2006), 108–116; Susan Sundback, "Folk Church Religion – A New Kind of Civil Religion?" in *The Church and Civil Religion in the Nordic Countries of Europe*, ed. Bela Harmati (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1984), 35–40; Kimmo Ketola, Heikki Pesonen, and Tom Sjöblom, "Uskonto ja moderni yhteiskunta: Uskontososiologian keskustelunaiheita," in *Näköaloja uskontoon: Uskontotieteen ajankohtaisia suuntauksia*, ed. Kimmo Ketola, Simo Korkee, Heikki Pesonen, Ilkka Pyysiäinen, Tuula Sakaranaho, and Tom Sjöblom (Helsinki: Yliopistopaino, 1998), 96–137; Jere Kyyrö, "Fluctuations between Folk Church, Nation-State and Citizenship: Contextualizing Civil Religion in Finland," in *Religion im Kontext | Religion in Context*, ed. Melanie Reddig, Annette Schnabel and Heidemarie Winkel (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2018), 193–208.

[46] Kääriäinen et al. *Religion in Finland*, 175.

even without using the term explicitly.[47] Although the focus is on individuals, the implication is that individuals continue to be socialized first and foremost into the ELCF.

Finally, there is the scholarly discourse that conceptually treats the ELCF as a state church. I already mentioned the international scholarship in the introduction.[48] Although I do not claim mine to be an exhaustive survey of the literature, I am confident in saying that in Finnish scholarship this discourse is a minority one. Indeed, I found only three examples. In the earliest, written for an international audience, the authors state: "one may conclude that there still are two State Churches in Finland, despite a gradual process towards fewer constitutional and other official links between the state and the two Churches."[49] Whether meant as such or not, the qualifier *may* in the beginning of the sentence is discursively important. It implies that *should one want*, the term may be used. However, "folk church" is not mentioned as an alternative. Neither is it mentioned by Ketola, who simply states that "the state church system has been gradually dismantled during the years," implying that while the ELCF is not *the* state church it used to be, enough aspects of that status remain for it to be still called one.[50] Finally, Mika Nokelainen defies the often-quoted idea that the Freedom of Religion Act of 1922/3 was the final nail on the coffin of the state church system. Instead, he argues that on the contrary, it enshrined this status by creating two classes of religious communities: those falling under the Freedom of Religion Act and those with constitutional

[47] See Pasi Ihalainen, "The Lutheran National Community in 18th Century Sweden and 21st Century Finland," *Redescriptions: Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History* 9, (2005): 80–112.

[48] See footnotes 2, 3, 4, and 5.

[49] Markku Heikkilä, Jyrki Knuutila, abd Martin Scheinin, "State and Church in Finland," in *State and Church in the European Union*, ed. Gerhard Robbers (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2005), 519–536.

[50] Kimmo Ketola, *Uskonnot Suomessa: Käsikirja uskontoihin ja uskonnollistaustaisiin liikkeisiin* (Tampere: Kirkon tutkimuskeskus, 2008).

and legislative privileges like the ELCF and the Orthodox Church. This was, according to him, especially true for the ELCF, which has broader autonomy than the Orthodox Church.[51] Although not scholarship, I should also mention here that Statistics Finland (the central statistical bureau) classifies the ELCF and the Orthodox Church as state churches.[52]

In sum, there is no consensus in Finnish scholarship over whether the ELCF should be called a state church or a folk church. But the "from state church to folk church" discourse works ideologically in the sense that few scholars explicitly say that the ELCF is *not* a state church, yet by preferring to call it a folk church they perpetuate the idea that "state church" is not an appropriate term. This leads to two further questions: First, if and when the international comparisons cited in the introduction so overwhelmingly call the ELCF a state church, why do Finnish scholars—theologians, especially—insist on calling it something else? Second, what is the broader impact of this conceptual turn in the discourse on church-state relations? I will tackle the former point in the conclusion, while the latter will be discussed in the two sections below.

The Church's Self-Presentation

The next step of my analysis is to examine whether and how the scholarly conceptualization of the ELCF has found its way to the self-presentation of the church. Quite a few of the studies quoted above have been produced by the Church Research Institute, which is a department of the ELCF, so it is somewhat a matter of taste whether to file them under scholarship or self-presentation. In any case, they have been an important bridge

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[51] Mika Nokelainen, *Vähemmistövaltiokirkon synty: Ortodoksisen kirkkokunnan ja valtion suhteiden muotoutuminen Suomessa, 1917–1922* (Helsinki: Suomen kirkkohistoriallinen seura, 2010).

[52] "State Church," Statistics Finland, accessed April 23, 2019, http://www.stat.fi/meta/kas/valtionkirkko_en.html

between academic conceptualizations and the church's self-understanding and -presentation. I will here focus on the internet age, when self-presentation has become not only technologically more accessible, but also socially required. Specifically, I will content myself with a snapshot from the 2010's using the official ELCF website (evl.fi) as a source.

The current ELCF Finnish-language webpages have a dedicated page titled "The Church as Part of Society," in which the church-society relationship is described as follows:

> The church is connected to Finnish society and culture in many ways . . . . Although the actual state church system was dismantled already in the 19th century, the church still has official connections with society, and the church's operation is legislated by the Church Act.[53]

Interestingly, the connection made here is to *society* (*yhteiskunta*) rather than to the state, although the "actual" state church system is said to have been dismantled already in the 19th century. This is a reference to the 1870 Church Act, which made the ELCF autonomous from the state, but which had no effect on its privileged status. The hedging word "actual" implies—quite rightly—that some sort of state connection remained.

A subpage titled "State and Church" tackles the question of state vs. folk church explicitly:

> The state church system has been dismantled in Finland in 1870. The state and the church are separate actors and the church makes its decisions independently. . . . The ELCF is better characterized by the word **folk church**. Majority of Finns are members of the church and it takes care of many important social functions. Lutheran culture and customs appear in many ways in Finnish culture.[54]

Unlike the starting page, the dedicated text on church and state is unambiguous about the ELCF *not* being a state church but a folk church instead. Indeed, it is as if the introductory paragraph is a pre-emptive comment on comparative studies such as Fox's: "In every

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[53] "Church as Part of Society," accessed April 23, 2019, https://evl.fi/tietoa-kirkosta/kirkko-ja-yhteiskunta?OpenDocument&lang=FI.

[54] "State and Church," accessed April 23, 2019, https://evl.fi/tietoa-kirkosta/kirkko-ja-yhteiskunta/valtionkirkko-ja-kansankirkko. Emphasis in the original.

country, the relations between the majority religion and the state have been organized differently, and the systems are incomparable."[55] In turn, the "folkness" of the church is justified by numbers (the "democratic" argument, see below) and by the ELCF's role in culture. The latter is further reinforced on the page titled "Cultural Heritage":

> Church environments are a central part of our cultural landscape. The rhythm of ordinary days and celebration, work, and rest is based on the Christian tradition. The churchly cultural heritage is present on every day of the year.[56]

Despite majority membership numbers, so few Finns attend the regular Sunday mass weekly that the church's own research prefers to present the number as people who visit at least once a month, which was nine per cent in 2015.[57] Rhetorically, then, it is the latent aspects of *our* "*churchly* cultural heritage" that matter more—indeed so much so, that these are present on *all* days of the year for the *volk*.

In contrast, the English-language version of the current ELCF website is sparse, to say the least. The page titled "Lutheranism in Finland" says only the following: "Prayer has been at the heart of many people's lives in Finland through the centuries, but – and this is a very Finnish characteristic – faith is a largely private matter."[58] Church and state are not mentioned at all. Religion is private and comes close to some sort of nature mysticism: "Even today, many Finns seek God in nature and the wilderness: in a forest, by a lake or at the

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[55] Ibid.

[56] "Cultural Heritage," accessed April 23, 2019, https://evl.fi/tietoa-kirkosta/kirkko-ja-yhteiskunta/kulttuuriperinto.

[57] Kimmo Ketola, Maarit Hytönen, Veli-Matti Salminen, Jussi Sohlberg, and Leena Sorsa, *Osallistuva luterilaisuus: Suomen evankelis-luterilainen kirkko vuosina, 2012–2015* (Tampere: Kirkon tutkimuskeskus, 2016), accessed April 23, 2019, http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/0/4D9073DDB9C38745C22576F20030A70E/$FILE/Kirkon%20nelivuotiskertomus_II%20osa_Osallistuva%20luterilaisuus_netti.pdf.

[58] "Lutheranism in Finland," accessed April 23, 2019, https://evl.fi/our-faith/lutheranism-in-finland.

seashore."[59] The sub-pages titled "history" and "worship in diversity" do mention key dates familiar from the above, but without explanation of their meaning.

The silence on the church and state issue is interesting in light of the previous homepages of the ELCF. I did an illustrative analysis of those pages for a conference paper in 2013, but I do not know when the page changed.[60] Thanks to the Wayback Machine archive, the pages can still be found. The Finnish and English language pages resemble each other much more than the current pages. The English version is not, however, a direct translation. It is worth looking at the pages side by side.

Translation from the Finnish:	*English Original:*
Finland does not have a state church system, but the church can be called a folk church. The church and state **cooperate** in many ways. […] [The Church] is an integral part of the people's history and culture. Majority of Finns belong to the church. The church's ceremonies, from baptism to funerals, and its customs are part of the Finnish tradition.[61]	The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has traditionally been labelled in two different ways: some speak of it as a state church, while others call it a folk church. Both labels are somewhat misleading and susceptible to propagandistic use…. These days Finland no longer has a state-church structure in the precise sense of the term. The system has

[59] Ibid.

1. [60] Titus Hjelm, 'One Volk, One Church? A Critique of the 'Folk' Church Ideology in Finland.' Presented at the annual conference of the British Sociological Association, London, UK, April 2013.

[61] "Valtiokirkko purettu kansankirkoksi," accessed April 23, 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/20131030173059/http://evl.fi/EVLfi.nsf/Documents/85BBFB4816F713BEC2256FEA003A7232?OpenDocument&lang=FI. Emphasis in the original.

> been dismantled step by step so as to give greater internal independence to the Lutheran Church.[62]

In Finnish, the question of state vs. folk church is unambiguous. Finland does not have a state church. But, there is—in bold—cooperation (*yhteistyö*), which is further explained in subsequent sub-pages. The text then repeats how the ELCF is hegemonic both in terms of numbers and culturally.

In English, by contrast, there is a whole paragraph of what Fairclough calls "hedging," in this case, the "some say, others say" structure.[63] Neither "state church" nor "folk church" is entirely correct and, significantly, both are "susceptible for propagandistic use." It is as if the ELCF is admitting the ideological nature of both terms! Furthermore, the English page also admits, in a way that Finnish pages do not, that

> [both terms] remain useful in that they still give a rough picture not only of the position of the church in Finnish society, but also of the relationship between the church and the state. In order to understand the current religious situation and church politics in Finland, it is important to bear in mind the country's strong state-church oriented tradition. This tradition is so long-standing and influential that the current situation is difficult to understand outside this context.[64]

The now defunct pages warrant a fuller analysis, even if they are no longer the official face of the church to Finns and English-speakers. The brief analysis here suffices to demonstrate the point about naturalization made above: "Folk church" (*kansankirkko*) in

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[62] "Church and State," accessed April 23, 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/20130312072427/http://evl.fi/EVLen.nsf/Documents/A47B48B9B3B2188AC22572B400213CE6?OpenDocument&lang=EN.

[63] Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 116.

[64] "Church and State," https://web.archive.org/web/20130312072427/http://evl.fi/EVLen.nsf/Documents/A47B48B9B3B2188AC22572B400213CE6?OpenDocument&lang=EN.

Finnish is the shorthand for "not state church." The old webpages at least go into detail about the basis for the conceptual change—although the end of state church status is always measured by the ELCF's autonomy from the state, never by its perpetual privileged status—but the complicated situation is only implied on the current pages. Silences matter.

"Folk Church" and the Status Quo in Parliament

My third set of data is a transcript of a plenary session in the Finnish parliament on February 15, 2006. The Members of Parliament (MPs) debated a Members' Initiative (diary number LA157/2005) regarding the equality of religious communities in Finland and proposed amendments to the constitution and several laws legislating the privileged status of the ELCF and the Orthodox Church.[65] There was never a vote for its passing because a new parliament was voted in while the proposal was doing the rounds in legislative committees. In Finland, proposals do not carry over to the next parliament. The case is nevertheless important because, as both discourse analysts and scholars of parliamentary democracy have noted, speeches in plenary sessions are about displaying MP's political credentials to their voters, media, and the broader public, while hammering out the details of initiatives happens in parliamentary committees.[66] Hence, the dominant type of research into religion and politics

[65] All quotes from the parliamentary debate refer to diary number LA 157/2005. *Laki Suomen perustuslain 76 §:n kumoamisesta sekä eräiden siihen liittyvien lakien kumoamisesta ja muuttamisesta*. The initiative and a transcript of the debate are available at: https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/Vaski/sivut/trip.aspx?triptype=ValtiopaivaAsiakirjat&docid=ptk+8/2006, accessed April 23, 2019; For a full analysis of the debate, see Titus Hjelm, "National Piety: Religious Equality, Freedom of Religion and National Identity in Finnish Political Discourse," *Religion* 44/1 (2014): 28–45.

[66] Ruth Wodak, "Introduction: Discourse Studies – Important Concepts and Terms," in *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michal Krzyzanowski (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), 1–29; Kari Palonen, "Speaking Pro et Contra: The Rhetorical Intelligibility of Parliamentary Politics and the Political Intelligibility of Parliamentary Rhetoric," in *The Parliamentary Style of Politics*, ed. Suvi Soininen & Tapani Turkka (Helsinki: The Finnish Political Science Association, 2008), 82–105.

that focuses on the content of constitutions and legislation, or their impact, misses a whole world of sociologically significant material.[67]

The initiative LA157/2005 was signed by Irina Krohn and Rosa Meriläinen, two Finnish Green Party MPs, but only Krohn sat in session when the proposal was brought to debate, bearing the brunt of the debate. The opposition to the proposal was unanimous—even the then Chair of the Green Party undermined it by stating that this was not a party initiative. Importantly, the focus on the "folk church" nature of the ELCF comprised only one aspect of the analyzed debate, but the connection between the ELCF and national identity is ideologically significant in light of what has been said above. The parliamentary discourse shows how the academic discourse, filtered through the ELCF's self-understanding, is a major factor in reproducing religious inequality in Finland.

The construction of the ELCF as "folk church" is explicit in the opening speech of the plenary session. In it, Christian Democrat MP Päivi Räsänen said: "The state is not denominational in itself, even though the Lutheran Church and also the Orthodox Church have the status of folk church."[68] The "folkness" of the ELCF is achieved in three distinct ways: symbolically, through an appeal to democracy, and by equating "Finnish values" with the values of the church. The first type equates the church with other national symbols, most explicitly in Räsänen's already quoted opening speech:

> Quickly going through this list, it seems like just about the only things that are forgotten is a proposal to abandon the flag with the blue cross, and changing

[67] E.g. Jack Barbalet, Adam Possamai, and Bryan Turner, eds., *Religion and the State: A Comparative Sociology* (London: Anthem Press, 2011); Patrick Michel and Enzo Pace, eds., *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion,* vol. 2*, Religion and Politics* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Stephen V. Monsma, and Soper J. Christopher, *The Challenge of Pluralism: Church and State in Five Democracies*, 2nd ed (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009).

[68] All quotations refer to the debate ("keskustelu") that can be accessed via the link provided above.

> religious holidays into working days. In my opinion, the best part of this bill is its short list of signatories.

Räsänen was here equating the stripping of the ELCF of its constitutionally privileged status with getting rid of the Finnish national flag. Rhetorically, this is an obvious expansion of the original issue, as the flag—possibly the most potent symbol of national identity—is of interest even to MPs indifferent to the politics of religion. It is also an intertextual reference to the famous Finnish saying "home, religion, and fatherland" (*koti, uskonto ja isänmaa*), which according to Virkkunen, "were the central Finnish values between the world wars."[69] The connection between church and *volk* could hardly be more forcefully argued.

Secondly, the MP's opposing the initiative play the numbers game: the privileged status of the ELCF is justified, because in a democracy, it is the will of the people. Räsänen again summarized the discourse: "In legislative work, it is justified to take into consideration the prevailing religious circumstances. It is justified for a religious community's legal status to reflect the community's real status in society, and *this is how democracy works*."[70] She continued: "84 per cent of Finns belong to the church and of them 73 per cent have never considered leaving the church. The juridical status of the Lutheran church reflects the religious situation in the country and its religious-cultural history." Finally, she repeated the idea in her closing statement: "Based simply on the *principles of democracy*, it is quite right that the influence of Christian values, Christian cultural heritage is visible."[71] The "democratic will" discourse was echoed in the responses of two Center Party MPs—incidentally, both were also ordained Lutheran ministers. MP Lauri Oinonen said, somewhat incoherently, "the laws are in harmony with the fact that citizens, who are both citizens of the

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[69] S. Virkkunen, *Suomalainen fraasisanakirja* (Helsinki: Otava, 1981), 207. For a discussion of intertextuality, see Fairclough*, Discourse and Social Change*, 101–136.

[70] Emphasis added.

[71] Emphasis added.

state, inhabitants of municipalities and mostly members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, can live with a legislation which is in harmony with itself." MP Simo Rundgren repeated the sentiment while defending religious education in state-funded schools: "About 85 per cent of Finns belong to the Lutheran church . . . This is just the way our will is."

In addition to national symbols and democratic will, MPs linked the privileged status of the church with Finnish values, the logic being that losing one would lead to the erosion of the other. This is not always expressed explicitly, but since the Christian values that Finnish society is putatively built upon are manifested in the church, changing the existing arrangement would be detrimental. Social Democrat MP Esa Lahtela argued that

> Finnish society is in any case built on this Christian value base. From that one could of course immediately say that when in Rome, do as the Romans do (*maassa maan tavalla*), which means that certain foundations have existed. Our legislation is built on a particular value base and it draws its strength from these values, which come from biblical doctrines, Christian doctrine.

Lahtela's Social Democrat colleague MP Kalevi Olin made the point that values are not just fancy dressing, but have material effects:

> That equality is realized is surely a modern aspiration, but, dear mister Speaker, according to research the success of Finnish society, for example in working life, is based on exactly the Protestant ethic, especially in agricultural but also in industrial society, on work ethic, and in this case it is worth asking whether there is a reason to abandon this kind of Lutheran viewpoint.

Olin's point is telling, because his statement implies that the work ethic is not only a Lutheran value, but an effect of the privileged status of the ELCF, which is, after all, the topic of the debate. Aspiring to equality is a commendable goal, but the price in this case would be too high.

Krohn's Green colleague, Erkki Pulliainen, made explicit that the values are institutionally manifested in the ELCF (and the Finnish Orthodox Church), hence reproducing the idea that touching the ELCF's privileged status means, ultimately, tampering with the "ultimate things" in Finnish society:

> Values belong to Finnish society as a very important element. Those particular values, specifically Christian values, whether they are realised (*toteutuivatpa ne*) in the Evangelical-Lutheran church or the Orthodox church, are very important things. They are downright ultimate things.

Discourse works ideologically when it obfuscates and misdirects. The intent of the initiative—explained and defended on several occasions by MP Krohn during the debate—was to make all religious communities equal in the eyes of law. It was not an attack on the ELCF as such, as Krohn had to remind her colleagues. However, the other MP's responses switch the focus of discussion from a question of religious equality to a question of national identity. Few politicians oppose equality as a political principle, but even fewer want to undermine the central symbols of national identity. The equation of *volk* and church in the debate sealed the fate of the proposal.

As noted above, for ideology critique absence is as important presence. Finnish church-state legislation has remained mostly untouched since the drafting of the first constitution and the original Freedom of Religion Act in the immediate years after Finland's independence in 1917. Hence, one could have expected the LA157/2005 initiative to generate heated debate in the parliament. The debate that emerged was loud at times, but the silence was louder: Of the 200 MPs in the Finnish parliament, *eight* took part in the debate, including Irina Krohn, one of the initiative's signatories. Now, we cannot get into the minds of these MPs in order to study their motivations, but it says *something* that so few—markedly, two of them Lutheran ministers and one known for her religious activism in parliament—bothered with any response at all. My thesis is that the same folk church ideology articulated by the several MPs present was manifested as absence among the rest: Changing the status quo was met by indifference or refusal to even debate the issue. Although it is obviously impossible to "prove" direct causal links, it is completely plausible to argue that the parliamentary discourse and the silence of the majority of MPs is a function of the established "folk church" discourse espoused by scholarship and the church itself. The difference is that in the

parliament the discourse has more immediate and direct consequences—in this case the preservation and reproduction of the status quo. Freedom of religion legislation in Finland might be robust from an individual's perspective, but debates and silences such as the above perpetuate the inequality of religious communities.[72]

Conclusion: The Ideological Function of "Folk Church"

In the above, I worked towards a conceptual history of the concept of "folk church" in Finnish public discourse—not for genealogy's sake, but in order to examine what is being done when people and institutions talk about "folk church." The above analysis shows that the concept is used to obfuscate the relationship between the ELCF and the Finnish state. It is used to misdirect in order to maintain the constitutionally and legally privileged position of the ELCF. This is what I call "folk church ideology." This ideology—meaning in the service of power—explains the discrepancy between international assessments of the Finnish church-state status and the insistence of Finnish scholars, the ELCF, and politicians that Finland does not have a state church.

A full analysis of *why* "folk church" is used ideologically warrants another study, but even a casual observer can note that dismantling the privileges of the ELCF in a secularizing society may have significant consequences for an institution that wields significant symbolic and material power. In turn—although the picture is far from simple—it is notable that the individuals (scholars, politicians) most keen to protect this privilege through ideological uses of "folk church" often have a stake in the ELCF and, consequently, in reproducing the religious status quo.

One common criticism of ideology critique is its normative premise. It is true that any kind of critique proceeds from a normative position, whether articulated or not. However, that

[72] See Hjelm, "National Piety."

does not make ideology critique unique in any way. First, as Minkenberg shows, normative conclusions are rife in church-state research, even if they are not explicit aims.[73] Second, for pragmatic reasons, the focus of this paper has been in the uses of "folk church," but the analysis could—and should—be extended to the ideological uses of "state church." These are blatantly present in some atheist and freethinker discourses, for example. Finally, as said above, critiquing what I have here called folk church ideology does not mean that the concept is inaccurate or useless. On the contrary, there are many good reasons to call the ELCF a folk church. But that does not mean that it is not a state church at the same time. That is why we need contemporary ideology critique to examine how and why "folk church" is used to obfuscate this relationship.

[73] Minkenberg, "The Policy Impact of Church-State Relations," 198–199.